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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 OTTAWA 000266

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/RPM (COPE), SCA/A (REOTT), AND WHA/CAN

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SUBJECT: CANADA'S INITIAL REACTION TO SPECIFIC REQUESTS TO
AFGHANISTAN

REF: STATE 31102

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Classified By: CDA Terry Breese, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Prime Minister will have personally to decide whether to extend Canada's politically fraught combat mission in southern Afghanistan beyond its scheduled 2011 end of operations and subsequent troop withdrawal. The European response to the President's engagement on ISAF at the NATO Summit will color PM Harper's thinking about the mission's prospects, and Canada's role in it. Intervention at the highest level might get the Prime Minister to show his cards.

Canadian government officials are improving defense, security, governance, and development in the volatile Kandahar Province in a manner consistent with the new U.S. strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. End summary.

¶2. (C) Charge delivered reftel points (both general and Canada-specific) to National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister Marie-Lucie Morin in Ottawa on April 2. Morin also included senior Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and Privy Council Office (PCO) staff in the meeting. Morin was non-committal in response to the U.S. specific requests for Canada, but promised to convey them immediately to Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his ministers in advance of the April 3-4 NATO Summit.

¶3. (C) Morin especially deferred to the Prime Minister Harper in response to the request that Canada "remain open to reconsidering its plan to withdraw combat forces after 2011 as the situation on the ground develops or at a minimum retain PRT, OMLTs, Police Mentoring Teams, and crucial enablers (airlift, intelligence, engineers) in Kandahar beyond 2011." She noted that PM Harper in his public comments so far had "been clear on the 2011 position" by emphasizing that the March 2008 House of Commons motion to extend Canadian Forces (CF) in Afghanistan would expire on December 2011. "It is up to the Prime Minister himself to revisit the matter as he sees fit," Morin remarked.

¶4. (C) In response to Charge's question about Canada's military planning for its post-2011 role in Afghanistan, Morin said that the Canadian inter-agency was focused on "the short-term, the here and now" rather than on what might occur in 2011. She suggested that the European NATO partners'

responses to President Obama's engagement in Strasbourg/Kehl would color the Prime Minister's thinking about the way ahead in Afghanistan. "So far we've heard many appeals, but not much of a response to those appeals," she said. The prospect of an election "in the next few months," she added, would weigh on PM Harper as he considers whether, and if so then when, to change course in Afghanistan.

¶5. (C) Shifting to the other Canada-specific tasks, Morin said senior officials were still studying the request for a \$100 million yearly donation to the Afghan National Army Trust Fund. She noted that Canada, Afghanistan, and Pakistan had just held another Dubai Process workshop (septel), at which they agreed to border policing, infrastructure, and trade facilitation action plans in which Afghanistan and Pakistan, with additional facilitation from Canada, would engage the G-8 and other key partners. Canada also is "actively engaged on promoting alternative livelihoods as part of its counter-narcotics (CN) engagement," she said, and supports the Afghan national CN strategy in numerous ways. On police training and mentoring, Morin observed that Canada had just funded the deployment of 50 additional Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) officers. (Note: Canada also is prepared to assign a sixth OMLT in the Kandahar region if the Afghan army deploys an additional battalion into theater. End note.)

¶6. (C) "As to the rest (the general points)," Morin remarked, "much of it we already are doing." This, she said, was because in many ways the U.S. review results mirror what the Canadians learned from a comprehensive review they completed early last year. Like the U.S. today, Canada last year concluded that it needed to do a better job of cementing progress on the defense and security front via fully

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integrated civilian assistance aimed at improving Afghan governance, rule of law and policing, and to improve economic opportunity, particularly in agriculture.

¶7. (C) Separately, Charge had briefed Afghan Ambassador to Canada Omar Samad prior to the demarche. Samad had not received parallel instructions from Kabul and did not join Charge.

¶8. (C) Comment: The April 2 request that Canada remain open to reconsidering its plan to withdraw combat forces, mentors, trainers, enablers, and its PRT in 2011 likely went straight to the Prime Minister's party in Strasbourg, and Canadian officials probably spent the night struggling to formulate a response. However, as Morin noted, PM Harper himself will have to decide whether, and if so when, to reconsider the planned withdrawal. It likely will take a direct, personal approach at the most senior level to elicit an authoritative response to reftel request. The minority status of his government and the likelihood of a new federal election within the coming year will limit PM Harper's options. As Liberal Defence Critic (shadow Foreign Minister) Bob Rae commented separately to PolMinCouns during a more general April 2 discussion on foreign policy, "no Prime Minister could make a decision to extend a combat role beyond 2011 until after the next election," and the Liberals would also be disinclined to extend even if they come to power.

¶9. (C) Comment (continued): This demarche already has complicated Prime Minister Harper's public position. During and since President Obama's February 19 Ottawa visit, PM Harper has repeatedly responded to questions about possible extensions by saying that the U.S. had made no specific request of Canada. As Morin noted, Harper now will have to deal with the results of a specific U.S. request.

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